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(PCT Rule 47.1(c), first sentence)

To:

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Date of mailing (day/month/year) 01 July 2004 (01.07.2004)		GROSSMAN, TUCKER, PERREAULT & PFELEGER, PLLC IMPORTANT NOTICE	
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Applicant COLLINS & AIKMAN PRODUCTS CO. et al			

1. Notice is hereby given that the International Bureau has **communicated**, as provided in Article 20, the international application to the following designated Offices on the date indicated above as the date of mailing of this notice:

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In accordance with Rule 47.1(c), third sentence, those Offices will accept the present notice as conclusive evidence that the communication of the international application has duly taken place on the date of mailing indicated above and no copy of the international application is required to be furnished by the applicant to the designated Office(s).

2. The following designated Offices have waived the requirement for such a communication at this time:

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The communication will be made to those Offices only upon their request. Furthermore, those Offices do not require the applicant to furnish a copy of the international application (Rule 49.1(a-bis)).

3. Enclosed with this notice is a copy of the international application as published by the International Bureau on 01 July 2004 (01.07.2004) under No. WO 2004/054829

4. TIME LIMITS for filing a demand for international preliminary examination and for entry into the national phase

The applicable time limit for entering the national phase will, **subject to what is said in the following paragraph**, be **30 MONTHS** from the priority date, not only in respect of any elected Office if a demand for international preliminary examination is filed before the expiration of **19 months** from the priority date, but also in respect of any designated Office, in the absence of filing of such demand, where Article 22(1) as modified with effect from 1 April 2002 applies in respect of that designated Office. For further details, see *PCT Gazette* No. 44/2001 of 1 November 2001, pages 19926, 19932 and 19934, as well as the *PCT Newsletter*, October and November 2001 and February 2002 issues.

In practice, **time limits other than the 30-month time limit** will continue to apply, for various periods of time, in respect of certain designated or elected Offices. For **regular updates on the applicable time limits** (20, 21, 30 or 31 months, or other time limit), Office by Office, refer to the *PCT Gazette*, the *PCT Newsletter* and the *PCT Applicant's Guide*, Volume II, National Chapters, all available from WIPO's Internet site, at <http://www.wipo.int/pct/en/index.html>.

For filing a **demand for international preliminary examination**, see the *PCT Applicant's Guide*, Volume I/A, Chapter IX. Only an applicant who is a national or resident of a PCT Contracting State which is bound by Chapter II has the right to file a demand for international preliminary examination (at present, all PCT Contracting States are bound by Chapter II).

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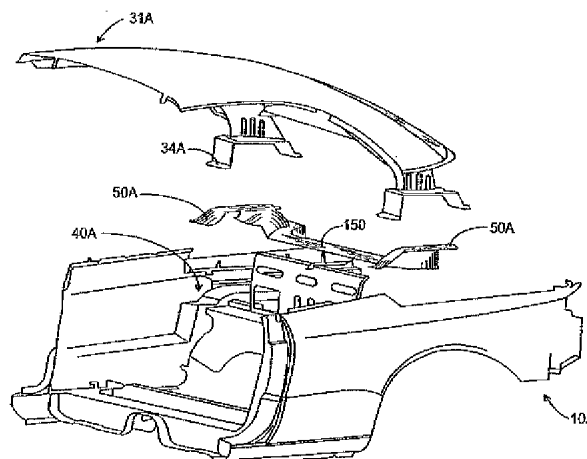
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For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: MULTIPLE ROOF CONFIGURATIONS FOR A SINGLE VEHICLE PLATFORM



(57) Abstract: An apparatus for use in a motor vehicle having a roof system, the motor vehicle further having a body with a passenger compartment and a trunk space, the apparatus comprising a roof system comprising any one of a rigid panel hardtop, a retractable hardtop moveable from an extended position disposed above the passenger compartment to a retracted position, or a soft convertible top moveable from an extended position disposed above the passenger compartment to a retracted position, wherein any one of the rigid panel hardtop, retractable hardtop or convertible soft top includes an attachment bracket. A transverse support beam having a first end and a second end is included, the support beam carrying any one of the rigid panel top, the retractable hardtop or the soft convertible top, wherein the first end and said second end include universal adapter brackets. The universal adapter brackets are connected to the attachment brackets and to the vehicle body.

MULTIPLE ROOF CONFIGURATIONS FOR A SINGLE VEHICLE PLATFORM

Cross-Reference to Related Applications

This application claims the benefit of U.S. provisional application Serial No. 60/433,132, filed December 13, 2003, the entire disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

Field of the Invention

This invention is directed at roof systems for motor vehicles wherein the use of a universal adapter structure allows the option of installing a rigid hardtop roof, a retractable hardtop roof or a fabric soft top convertible roof configuration into a single motor vehicle platform as part of an on-line assembly process. In addition, a transverse support beam is provided which may serve as a sub-component build-up structure, a handling and dunnage support and as a connecting means to the universal adapter structure to accurately and reliably locate any of the vehicle roof systems.

Background of the Invention

While rigid hardtops comprise the roof system for most motor vehicles, there is a continuing demand for retractable tops, both soft and hard, for sportier "convertible" versions. Generally, the annual volume requirements for convertibles are low and the structural requirements are different enough from the standard rigid hardtop model that a special off-line or modular production facility is employed for build-up and assembly of convertible options. Different attachment points for the various types of roofs are usually required as well as hinging mechanisms for folding the convertible top. A portion of the trunk of the vehicle is usually employed to store the retracted top in its collapsed form.

Roof systems for most vehicles are rigid metal sections, which are welded in place and provide a portion of the structural integrity of the vehicle. It is also common in the automobile industry to employ fabric soft top convertible roofs or retractable hardtop convertible roofs, which are movable from an extended position above a passenger compartment to a retracted position near the vehicle trunk. The traditional retractable hardtop roof system employs a plurality of rigid roof panels, which can slide or be hinged and retracted for storage into the rear passenger compartment or trunk of the vehicle. A more

popular convertible roof system comprises a fabric-covered frame, which can fold and retract in a like manner taking up much less space in the vehicle.

However, to accommodate both rigid hardtop as well convertible soft top or retractable hardtop versions on a vehicle platform, separate coupe and convertible (open roof) bodies must be provided to the assembly plant. Each of these roof systems has its own attachment points, structural requirements and assembly details which does not allow the use of a single vehicle platform body-in-white to accommodate all three options.

In order to reduce the cost of off-line assembly of these lower volume options, it is desirable to provide a single vehicle platform body-in-white which can accept any of the three roof system options and allow installation of that option as part of a just-in-time or sequenced part delivery demand system on a moving vehicle assembly line.

In this manner, as a customer order for a vehicle is received at the assembly plant and programmed into the daily schedule, the desired roof system can be scheduled to arrive at the installation station to mate up with the vehicle body as part of a sequenced delivery process. Since only a single vehicle platform body-in-white is required, a uniform production rate and normal assembly procedure can be employed regardless of which roof system is to be installed.

There are numerous patents which address convertible soft tops and retractable hardtops for vehicles, however, in each case a body which is specially designed to accommodate only that style of top is required, rather than a universal body adapter structure which would allow a vehicle body to accommodate any of three distinctly different types of roof system as provided by the present invention. United States Patent Nos. 6,390,532 B1 and 6,422,637 B1 are directed at retractable hardtops for motor vehicles and are assigned to the assignee of the present invention and are included herein by reference.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a universal adapter structure that allows the installation of a rigid hardtop roof, a retractable hardtop roof or a soft fabric retractable convertible roof into a single vehicle platform body-in-white on a moving assembly line.

It is a further object of this invention to provide a system of accurate and repeatable location and attachment points for all three of the roof systems using a spider gage.

It is further object of this invention to provide a cross-car structure for assembly, transporting and installation of the vehicle roof system into the vehicle body. This structure may also provide a location for the power unit which drives the activation of the convertible top.

It is a still further object of the present invention to provide a rear deck lid capable of being hinged at both the front and the rear such that the convertible top may be easily stored, in addition to allowing normal access to the trunk from the rear of the vehicle.

It is a still further object of the present invention to provide a vehicle body-in-white which is designed to accept the worst case structural stress and strain caused by any one of the convertible roof system options.

It is a still further object of the present invention to provide a roof header structure that permits latching of either the hardtop or soft top convertible roof system as well as permanent fastening of the rigid hard top roof system.

These and further objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following description when taken in connection with the accompanying drawings which, for purposes of illustration only, show several embodiments in accordance with the present invention.

Summary of the Invention

In a first embodiment, the present invention is directed at an apparatus for use in a motor vehicle having a roof system, said motor vehicle further having a body with a passenger compartment and a trunk space, said apparatus comprising a roof system comprising any one of a rigid panel hardtop, a retractable hardtop moveable from an extended position disposed above said passenger compartment to a retracted position, or a soft convertible top movable from an extended position disposed above said passenger compartment to a retracted position, wherein any one of said rigid panel hardtop, retractable hardtop or convertible soft top includes an attachment bracket. A transverse support beam is supplied having a first end and a second end, said support beam carrying any one of said rigid panel top, said retractable hardtop or said soft convertible top, wherein said first end and said second end include universal adapter brackets. The universal adapter brackets are connected to said attachment brackets and to the vehicle body.

In a second embodiment, the present invention is directed at an apparatus for use in a motor vehicle having a roof system, said motor vehicle further having a body with a passenger compartment and a trunk space, said apparatus comprising a roof system comprising any one of a rigid panel hardtop, a retractable hardtop moveable from an extended position disposed above said passenger compartment to a retracted position, or a soft convertible top movable from an extended position disposed above said passenger compartment to a retracted position, wherein any one of said rigid panel hardtop, retractable

hardtop or convertible soft top includes an attachment bracket. A transverse support beam is supplied having a first end and a second end, said support beam carrying any one of said rigid panel top, said retractable hardtop or said soft convertible top, wherein said first end and said second end include universal adapter brackets, and wherein said universal adapter brackets
5 are connected to said attachment brackets.

In a third embodiment the present invention is directed at a motor vehicle having a roof system, said motor vehicle further having a passenger compartment and a trunk space, said motor vehicle comprising a single body capable of accepting a roof system comprising any one of a rigid panel hardtop, a retractable hardtop or a soft convertible top, and a
10 universal adapter brackets attached to said body to locate and attach said any one of said rigid panel hardtop, said retractable hardtop or said soft convertible top roof system.

In a fourth embodiment, the present invention is directed at a motor vehicle roof system for use in an automotive vehicle having a passenger compartment and a storage compartment, said roof system comprising a transverse support beam structure having a first end and a second end, one of (i) a rigid panel roof structure fastened to said vehicle or (ii) a
15 retractable hardtop structure said retractable hardtop structure comprising a series of hingedly or slidably engaged panels, said retractable hardtop being movable between an extended position covering the passenger compartment and a retracted position for storage in said storage compartment, or (iii) a soft convertible top structure comprising a fabric covering and
20 folding mechanism, said soft convertible top being movable between an extended position covering said passenger compartment and a retracted position for storage in said storage compartment, wherein said transverse beam structure connects to one of said rigid panel roof, retractable hardtop or soft convertible top to provide for assembly of one of said rigid panel
25 roof, retractable hardtop or soft convertible top upon said beam. The transverse support structure provides a handling and transport aid for said roof system, and said transverse support provides attachment at said first end and said second end within said vehicle.

Brief Description of the Drawings

To better understand and appreciate the invention, refer to the following detailed
30 description in connection with the accompanying drawings.

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a body-in-white vehicle into which any of the roof systems of the present invention may be installed.

FIG. 1A is a perspective view of the vehicle body of FIG. 1.

FIG. 2 is a side view of a fabric soft top convertible roof system according to the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a side view of a retractable hardtop roof system according to the present invention.

5 FIG. 4 is a side view of a rigid hardtop roof system according to the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of the adapter bracket, which is used as an attachment point for any of the three roof systems of the present invention.

FIG. 5A is a side view of the adapter bracket and spider gage for installing the bracket of the present invention.

10 FIG. 6 is a perspective view of the spider gage, which locates and positions the bracket of the present invention.

FIGS. 7, 8 and 9 are side views of the rear deck hinging mechanism, which allows storage of either the retractable or convertible top.

15 FIGS. 10-12 are perspective views of a rigid roof system being installed into a common vehicle body.

FIGS. 13-15 are perspective views of a retractable hard top being installed into a common vehicle body.

In the appended drawings, common elements use the same numeric character but are distinguished by the addition of a letter to identify a common element between embodiments (for instance 10, 10A, 10B, etc.).

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Description of Preferred Embodiments

In accordance with the present invention there is provided a novel and improved universal adapter structure that allows the installation of any one of a rigid roof system, a retractable hardtop roof system or a soft top convertible roof system into a single vehicle platform body-in-white. The universal adapter structure comprises a set of metal brackets, which can be positioned by a spider gage which is located by dimensional registration points in the body-in-white structure. The spider gage locates, positions, orients and attaches the universal adapter brackets to the body structure in the vicinity of the vehicle rear wheelwells to coincide with the attachment brackets of the roof system that is targeted for installation into the specific body being assembled. The attachment brackets for each roof system may have unique features that match features in the universal adapter brackets.

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To further ensure an accurate fit of the roof system to the body-in-white, the spider gage or an accompanying robot may preferably mill slots and drill holes in the brackets or body structure to ensure that each fit is dimensionally accurate.

The present invention further provides a transverse support structure, which may preferably carry the particular roof system to be installed which has at each end unique attachment brackets and which attaches to the aforementioned adapter structure. The transverse beam structure has the advantage of acting as an assembly base for building up components and sub-components of the roof system, including the power drive unit, that make up the particular roof system to be installed. Later in the process flow, the support may also serve as a handling and transport (dunnage) aid for installation into the vehicle.

In addition, the present invention provides a rear deck lid capable of pivoting around both front and rear edges to allow storage of the retractable or convertible top as well as to allow for normal usage of the trunk area of the vehicle. Further, the present invention provides for latching of the convertible or retractable top as well as fastening of the rigid roof to the roof header structure at the windshield.

The present invention preferably comprises a single common motor vehicle body and, optionally, any one of three roof systems which can be installed according to the schedule on an assembly line by using a universal adapter bracket system and a spider gage. The roof system may be carried on a transverse support, which attaches to the brackets of the universal adapter system and becomes part of the vehicle structure in the area of the rear seat or package tray.

FIG. 1 is a side view of a vehicle body-in-white ready to have a roof system installed according to the present invention. This is the common body construction as provided by the present invention which would be designed and built structurally to accommodate any of a rigid roof system, a retractable hardtop system or a soft convertible top system.

FIG. 2 is a side view of a soft fabric convertible top roof system **11** that may be installed on the body **10** of FIG. 1 according to the present invention. The convertible top is comprised of a foldable fabric covering **12**, and a pivot and linkage system **16** which allows the flexible top to fold upon itself and retract into a space behind the rear seat or in the trunk of the vehicle. A fastening system **17** is provided at the front end of the roof system to attach to the windshield header structure (**15** in FIG. 1) of the body **10** for securing the roof system **11** in an expanded state which then covers the passenger portion of the vehicle interior. An attachment bracket system **14** is shown which mates to a universal adapter bracket installed into the vehicle body **10** in the proximity of the rear wheel wells (see FIG. 5) to secure the

rear of the convertible top to the vehicle body. Typically, the rear attachment brackets **14** on the roof system are connected to the universal adapter brackets by bolts or rivets.

FIG. 3 illustrates a second vehicle roof system, a retractable hardtop roof system **21** which may be optionally installed into the body **10** of FIG. 1. The retractable hardtop comprises a rear window **22** and a rigid panel rearward portion **19** hingedly connected at **20** to a rigid panel forward portion **18**. In an extended condition, the top **21** is connected to the body windshield header (**15** in FIG. 1) at the front, and at the rear through bracket **24** to the universal adapter bracket of the present invention when installed into the body **10** of the vehicle in the vicinity of the rear wheel wells (see FIG. 5). As shown in FIG. 8 and 9, the retractable hard top can fold around hinge point **20** (FIG. 3) and retract into the trunk of the vehicle by hinging the rear deck lid near its rear edge.

FIG. 4 illustrates the third roof system which may be optionally installed in body **10** of FIG. 1, in this case a rigid roof system **31**. The rigid roof system **31** comprises a rigid panel **30** and a rear window **32** which are fastened, usually by welding, at the front edge to the windshield header structure (**15** in FIG. 1). The rear of the rigid top is fastened at attachment bracket **34** to a universal adapter bracket installed in the rear wheel well area of the body **10**. Optionally, the top may also be welded to the vehicle body along its rear edge **33**.

Turning to FIG. 1A, a prospective view of the interior of the vehicle body **10** in FIG. 1 is shown. Here, the windshield header structure is more clearly seen at **15**. The proximity for installation of the rear attachment bracket **14**, **24** and **34** of FIGS. 2, 3 and 4 for each of the roof system options is shown at **40**. As will next be described, a spider gage is preferably employed to accurately locate the universal adapter brackets in the vicinity of **40** on each side of the body **10**. This gage engages with body registration points on the windshield header structure **15**, on the sides of the body in the proximity of **40** and at the rear of the vehicle in the proximity of **42**.

FIG. 5 is a close-up of the body **10** in the area of the rear wheel well **40** and illustrates a universal adapter bracket **50** for installation in the vehicle. The bracket **50** contains a pattern of holes **53**, or optionally other features, some of which match up to each of the aforementioned bracket systems (**14**, **24**, **34** of FIGS. 2, 3 and 4 respectively). The adapter bracket **50** is shown mounted on a dimensionally accurate rigid metal spider gage **52** which may position, orient, locate and attach the bracket to the vehicle body at **54** by welding, bolting or otherwise securely fastening. For the three different roof systems of the present invention, the spider gage may install the adapter bracket **50** in any of a number of

orientations to accommodate the specific roof system indicated for the specific body number that is being assembled. In that case, fewer locating holes are required since the orientation of the adapter bracket **50** defines which roof system will align with the holes or features in the roof system attachment brackets.

5 In an optional embodiment, the adapter bracket **50** may contain a larger number of holes and be installed in a single orientation. The bolt holes or features in the respective roof system bracket (**14, 24 and 34**) would then align with corresponding hole **52**, or feature in the adapter bracket **50** for the roof option selected, upon installation of the roof system (**11, 21 or 31** of FIGS. 2, 3, and 4) into the vehicle body **10**.

10 A further option is for the spider gage to locate the brackets and a separate robot or person to install the brackets by riveting, bolting or welding to the vehicle body.

FIG. 5A is a side view of the vehicle body **10** illustrating the position of the universal adapter bracket **50** held by the spider gage **52** before installation of the adapter bracket into the vehicle at **54**. Also illustrated here are locating features on the spider gage **52** at **60, 62,**
15 **64 and 66** for registering the spider gage **52** with the body **10** to assure that the adapter bracket **50** is accurately positioned in the body at **54**.

FIG. 6 illustrates the same gage but in a perspective view. Here the structure and rigidity built into the spider gage to ensure accurate placement of the bracket is evident. To accurately locate the bracket **50** in the body **10**, a forward corner **61** of the spider gage **52** is
20 engaged with a hole **70** in the windshield header structure **15** to provide fore-aft and cross-car location. The other front corner **60** of the spider gage **52** is engaged with a cross-car slot **72** at the opposite corner of the windshield header **15** which allows the gage to pivot slightly around hole **70** to accommodate some variation in vehicle build. Additional features at **62,**
64 and 66 on the gage pick up body registration points to further locate the adapter bracket **50**
25 in the up-down plane.

The process to install the adapter brackets **50** on both sides of the vehicle in the area of the rear wheelwells involves the adapter brackets **50** being loaded onto each side of the spider gage **52** using pins (**63** in FIG. 5A) which engage with holes in the adapter bracket **50**. The spider gage is then robotically engaged with the aforementioned registration features in
30 the vehicle body when the body arrives at the bracket installation station. The spider gage is lowered into position and locates and installs the bracket **50** to the body of the vehicle at **54** either by welding or bolting the bracket in its correct position and orientation for the roof system intended for that specific vehicle body at the demand of the sequenced part delivery system for that assembly line. The spider gage is equipped with hydraulic side action (**57** in

FIG. 3) that forces the bracket into contact with the vehicle body. Separate welding or bolting robots, or manual assembly may be used to secure the bracket in position to the body. The spider gage then retracts the pins holding the adapter brackets via hydraulic side action and is robotically removed from the body of the vehicle to be used for installation of brackets on the next vehicle.

In an alternate embodiment, the spider gage may locate the adapter bracket and while in that position a robot or other device may mill slots or drill holes in both the body and the bracket to locate the adapter bracket. Alternatively, the spider gage or another robot may be used to weld or bolt the adapter bracket in place while it is being held by the gage.

Turning to FIGS. 7, 8 and 9, the provision for storing either the hard or soft top convertible roof system in the trunk of the vehicle is illustrated.

FIG. 7 is a side view of the vehicle of FIG. 1 with the side panels removed and a retractable hardtop roof system 21A installed according to the present invention. The roof system 21A comprises a forward hard panel portion 18A which is hingedly connected at 20A to a rear hard panel portion 19A and rear window 22A. The roof system attachment bracket 24A attaches to the universal adapter bracket (not shown) on the vehicle body. Also shown in FIG. 7 are the vehicle rear deck (trunk) lid 80, the trunk lid latch mechanism 82 and two hinging mechanisms 84 and 86 to allow the trunk to hinge or pivot at the front of the lid for normal trunk access or for the lid to hinge or pivot at the rear to allow the convertible hard or soft top to be retracted and stored in the trunk of the vehicle.

FIG. 8 illustrates how normal use of the vehicle trunk area is achieved, as the rear deck lid is unlatched at 82 and allowed to swing open from the rear of the vehicle by hinging or pivoting around a mechanism 86 located near the front of the rear deck lid 80. The rear deck lid is held open by a gas cylinder or tension spring mechanism 88.

FIG. 9 illustrates hinging of the rear deck lid around a rearward point to allow the retractable hard top to be folded and stored in the trunk space. In FIG. 9, the rear deck lid 80 opens from its front edge due to the action of an extension mechanism 92 and gas cylinder 94 which force the rear deck lid upward. The latch mechanism 82 retains the rear edge of the rear deck lid and the rear deck lid is hinged around its lower rearmost point at 96 to allow the rear deck lid 80 to raise, allowing space for the retractable top to fold, hinge or slide into the trunk of the vehicle. FIG. 9 illustrates this feature as window 22A and rear hard panel portion 19A can be seen folded under front hard panel portion 18A when they are in a collapsed storage position in the vehicle trunk space. The storage of the retractable top can be actuated by the driver electronically once the front latching mechanisms are unlatched.

In an alternate embodiment, the present invention comprises a transverse support in the shape of a beam member which may be used to attach the selected roof system to the vehicle body. The transverse support may be attached to the aforementioned adapter brackets before or after they have been located and installed to the vehicle body, thus providing additional structure to the vehicle body in an area just rearward of the rear seats of the vehicle. Subsequently, the selected roof system may be attached to the transverse support. In an alternate embodiment, the roof system may be first assembled to the transverse support, including pivot linkage, power drive unit, etc., and then the transverse support may act as an assembly fixture as well as transport means, subsequently functioning to connect the roof system to the car body through the adapter brackets. FIG. 10-15 illustrates these embodiments.

In FIG. 10, the rear half of a vehicle body **10A** is shown sectioned cross-car at about the midpoint of the vehicle. In this embodiment, the adapter brackets **50A** are integrated into a transverse support structure **150**. The adapter brackets **50A** are oriented essentially horizontally and mount to the body in the area of the wheelwells **40A** of the vehicle body **10A**. Also shown in FIG. 10 is a rigid hard roof system **31A** which may subsequently be attached to the adapter brackets **50A** on the transverse support **150** in the vehicle body **10A**.

FIG. 11 is an additional view showing the installation of the rigid hard roof system **31A** into the vehicle body **10A** wherein the adapter brackets **50A** are now located and attached to the vehicle body **10A** in the area of the rear wheelwell **40A** and subsequently the rigid roof system **31A** is attached through attachment brackets **34A** to the adapter brackets **50A**.

FIG. 12 is an enlarged view of this area of attachment, viewed from underneath the rigid roof system. In this view, adapter bracket **50A** is located on and attached to sheet metal body **10A** using bolts **98**. In underlying relationship, the attachment brackets **34A** are then attached using the same bolts **98**. Alternatively, attachment of the respective bracketry may be by welding, adhesive or other means known to those skilled in the art. In this embodiment, the transverse support **150** is shown attached to the vehicle body **10A** in an area rearward of the rear seat back **99** to provide additional structural support to the vehicle body. Subsequently, the rigid hard roof system may be attached at the roof header (not shown) and other area in the vehicle body to meet vehicle structural and safety requirements. FIG. 13-15 illustrate a similar process for installing a convertible top roof system of the present invention into the same vehicle body, in this case the roof system is a retractable hard top. In FIG. 13 a transverse support **150A** includes adapter brackets **50B** which conform to an area of the

vehicle body **10B** in the area of the rear wheelwells. The adapter brackets **50B** may contain unique features such as slots, recesses or a hole pattern that distinguish one roof system from another such any of the aforementioned roof systems may be accurately installed in the vehicle body. A retractable hardtop roof system **21B** is shown in a position above the vehicle
5 body **10B** and adapter brackets **50B**, ready to be installed. FIG. 14 is a view showing the transverse beam **150A** including adapter brackets **50B** after installation and attachment using a spider gage (not shown) into rear wheelwells of the vehicle body **10B**. In this view, the retractable hardtop roof system **21B** is in a collapsed condition, ready for storage in the trunk
10 area of the vehicle body **10B** and comprises a forward hard panel portion **18B**, a rear hard panel portion **19B** and a rear window (not visible). Attachment bracketry **24B** and pivot and linkage mechanism **25** for expanding the roof system to cover the passenger area of the vehicle body **10B** is also shown.

FIG. 15 is a view showing the convertible top, in this case a retractable hardtop **21B**, stored in the trunk area of the vehicle behind the rear wheelwell area **40B** and installed in
15 overlying relationship to the adapter brackets **50B** and transverse support **150A** using attachment brackets **24B**.

Thus, it can be appreciated that the present invention provides an apparatus and method for installing any one of a number of types of roof systems into a common vehicle body through the use of a universal adapter structure which is preferably located quite
20 accurately in a vehicle body using a spider gage. An alternate embodiment includes a transverse support member which may be used to join the adapter brackets and provide additional structure to the vehicle body and roof system. The advantage of this invention over the prior methods of assembling convertible roof systems become clear when the detailed description is taken in combination with the appended drawings. In addition, it is
25 noted that the various features in all of the illustrations may be properly exchanged between each embodiment as may be appropriate in the context of the present invention.

The description and drawings illustratively set forth the presently preferred invention embodiment. We intend the description and drawings to describe this embodiment and not to limit the scope of the invention. Obviously, it is possible to modify these embodiments while
30 remaining within the scope of the following claims. Therefore, within the scope of the claims, one may practice the invention otherwise than as the description and drawings specifically show and describe.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for use in a motor vehicle having a roof system, said motor vehicle further having a body with a passenger compartment and a trunk space, said apparatus comprising:

5 a roof system comprising any one of a rigid panel hardtop,
a retractable hardtop moveable from an extended position disposed above said passenger compartment to a retracted position, or a soft convertible top movable from an extended position disposed above said passenger compartment to a retracted position, wherein any one of said rigid panel hardtop, retractable hardtop or convertible soft top
10 includes an attachment bracket

a transverse support beam having a first end and a second end, said support beam carrying any one of said rigid panel top, said retractable hardtop or said soft convertible top, wherein said first end and said second end include universal adapter brackets,

wherein said universal adapter brackets are connected to said attachment brackets and
15 to the vehicle body.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 including a dual hinged rear deck lid covering said trunk space wherein said rear deck lid is capable of pivoting to allow retraction of any one of said retractable hardtop or said soft convertible top into said trunk space for storage.

20 3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said universal adapter brackets comprise metal plates containing a series of holes or slots or features that align with said first end and said second end of said transverse beam.

25 4. The universal adapter brackets of claim 1 wherein said brackets are attached to said vehicle body by any one of welding, riveting, bolting or adhesive attachment.

5. An apparatus for use in a motor vehicle having a roof system, said motor vehicle further having a body with a passenger compartment and a trunk space, said
30 apparatus comprising:

a roof system comprising any one of a rigid panel hardtop,
a retractable hardtop moveable from an extended position disposed above said passenger compartment to a retracted position, or a soft convertible top movable from an extended position disposed above said passenger compartment to a retracted position,

wherein any one of said rigid panel hardtop, retractable hardtop or convertible soft top includes an attachment bracket

a transverse support beam having a first end and a second end, said support beam carrying any one of said rigid panel top, said retractable hardtop or said soft convertible top, wherein said first end and said second end include universal adapter brackets,

wherein said universal adapter brackets are connected to said attachment brackets.

6. The apparatus of claim 5 wherein said universal adapter brackets comprise metal plates containing a series of holes or slots or features that align with said first end and said second end of said transverse beam.

7. The universal adapter brackets of claim 5 wherein said brackets are attached to said vehicle body by any one of welding, riveting, bolting or adhesive attachment.

8. The apparatus of claim 5 wherein said transverse support beam is connected to the vehicle body.

9. A motor vehicle having a roof system, said motor vehicle further having a passenger compartment and a trunk space, said motor vehicle comprising:

a single body capable of accepting a roof system comprising any one of a rigid panel hardtop, a retractable hardtop or a soft convertible top, and

universal adapter brackets attached to said body to locate and attach said any one of said rigid panel hardtop, said retractable hardtop or said soft convertible top roof system.

10. A motor vehicle roof system for use in an automotive vehicle having a passenger compartment and a storage compartment, said roof system comprising:

a transverse support beam structure having a first end and a second end,

one of (i) a rigid panel roof structure fastened to said vehicle or (ii) a retractable hardtop structure said retractable hardtop structure comprising a series of hingedly or slidably engaged panels, said retractable hardtop being movable between an extended position covering the passenger compartment and a retracted position for storage in said storage compartment, or (iii) a soft convertible top structure comprising a fabric covering and folding

mechanism, said soft convertible top being movable between an extended position covering said passenger compartment and a retracted position for storage in said storage compartment,

wherein said transverse beam structure connects to one of said rigid panel roof, retractable hardtop or soft convertible top to provide for assembly of one of said rigid panel roof, retractable hardtop or soft convertible top upon said beam,

wherein said transverse support structure provides a handling and transport aid for said roof system, and

wherein said transverse support provides attachment at said first end and said second end within said vehicle.

11. The transverse support of claim 10, wherein said transverse support provides structural support to the vehicle.

12. The transverse support of claim 10, wherein said transverse support includes a power unit for extending and retracting said retractable hardtop or said soft convertible top.

13. An apparatus for storing a retractable roof system for a vehicle having a trunk and a passenger compartment, said apparatus comprising:

a trunk lid having a front edge and a rear edge,

a pivot mechanism located near said trunk lid rear edge to allow said trunk lid front edge to pivot from a closed position to an extended position wherein said retractable roof system can be retracted from an open position covering the passenger compartment of a vehicle to a retracted position in said trunk, and

a pivot mechanism located near said trunk lid front edge to allow said trunk lid to pivot around said front edge from a closed position to an open position to allow access to said trunk.

14. A method of installing a roof system on a motor vehicle body comprising the steps of;

providing a common vehicle body having dimensional registration points, selecting a roof system to be installed on said body, wherein said roof system comprises one of a rigid hardtop, a retractable hardtop or a soft convertible top, wherein said roof system includes attachment brackets with mating features,

providing adapter brackets wherein said adapter brackets contain mating features that correspond to mating features in said attachment brackets,

providing a spider gage, wherein said spider gage is located in said vehicle via said dimensional registration points, wherein said spider gage includes said adapter brackets,

5 locating said adapter brackets mounted on said spider gage to said vehicle body,
 attaching said adapter brackets to said vehicle body,
 removing said spider gage,

installing one of said rigid hardtop, retractable hardtop or soft convertible top on to
said adapter brackets in said vehicle body by matching the mating features in said adapter
10 brackets to the mating features in said attachment bracket,

attaching said selected roof said system to said vehicle body.

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FIG. 1

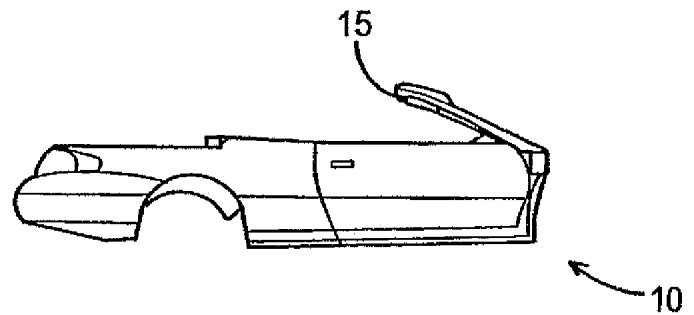


FIG. 2

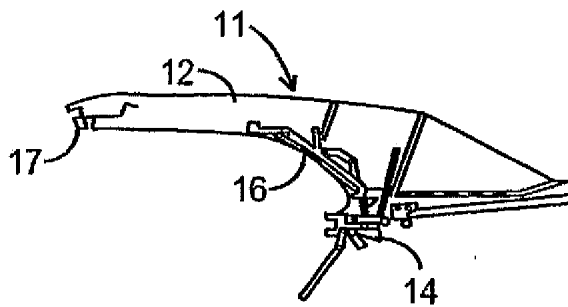


FIG. 3

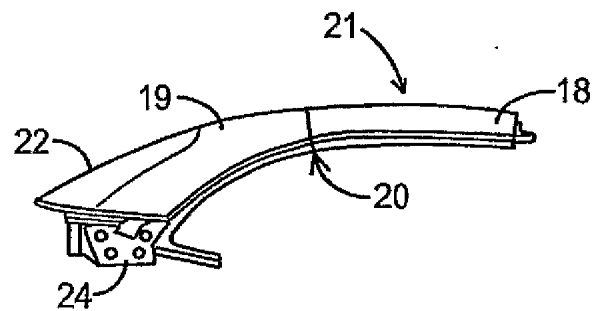
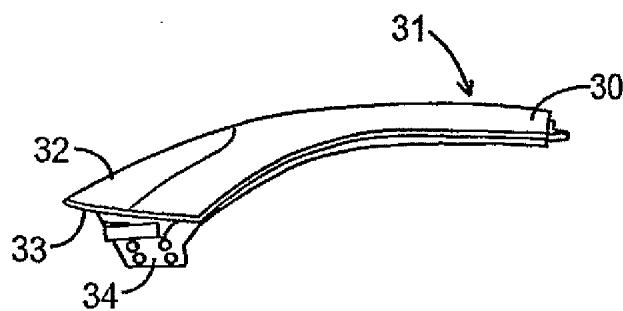
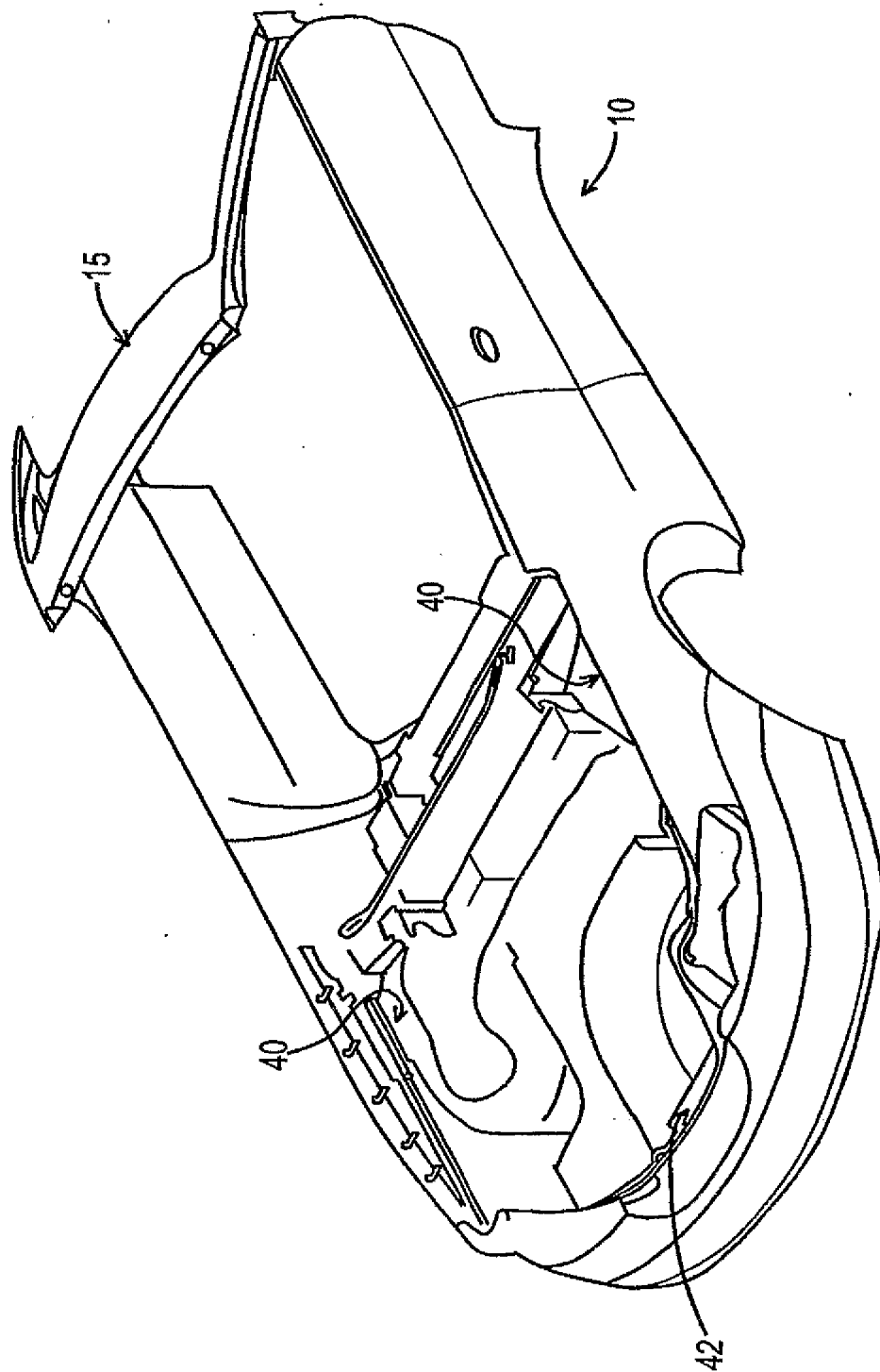


FIG. 4

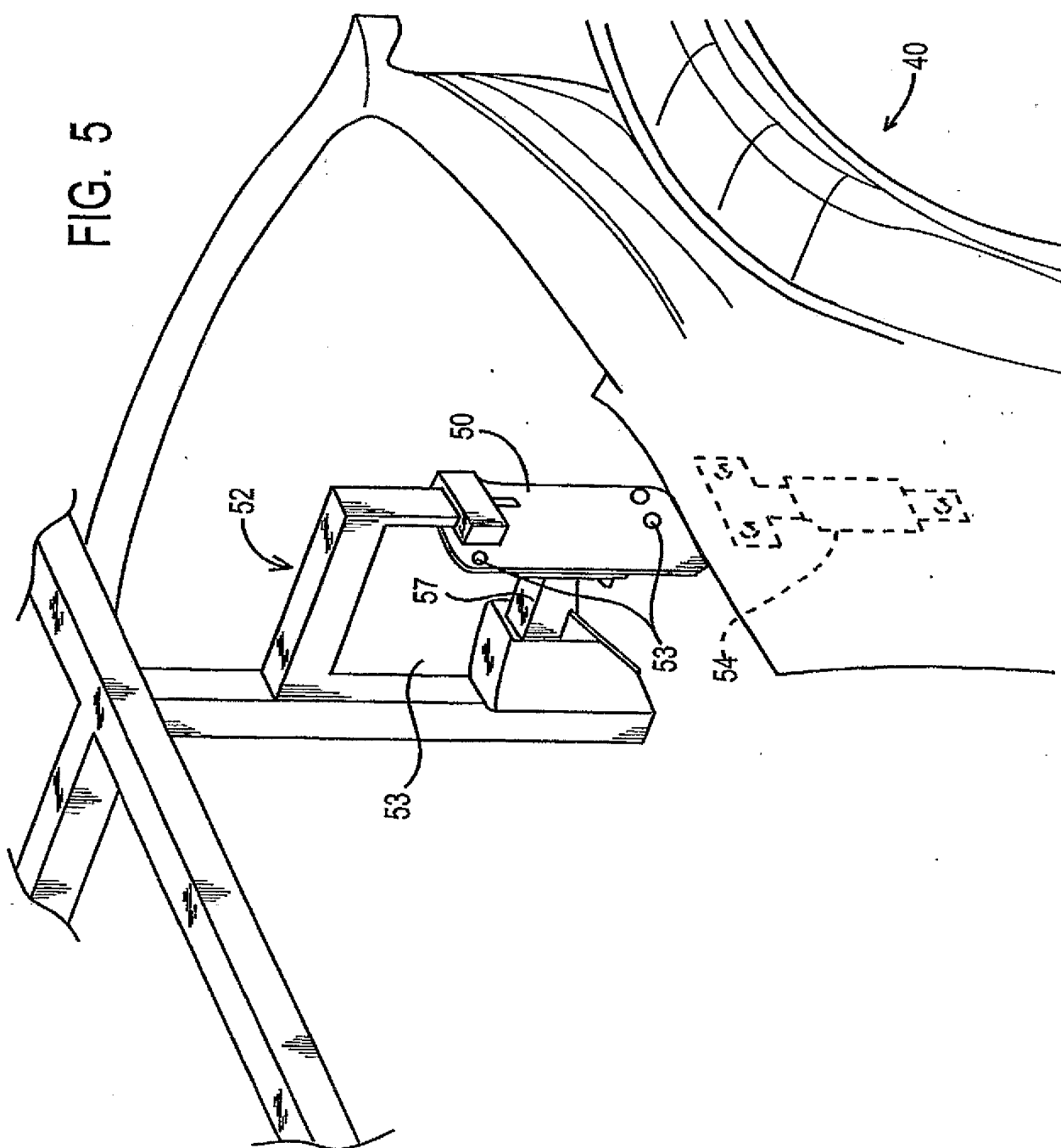


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FIG. 1A

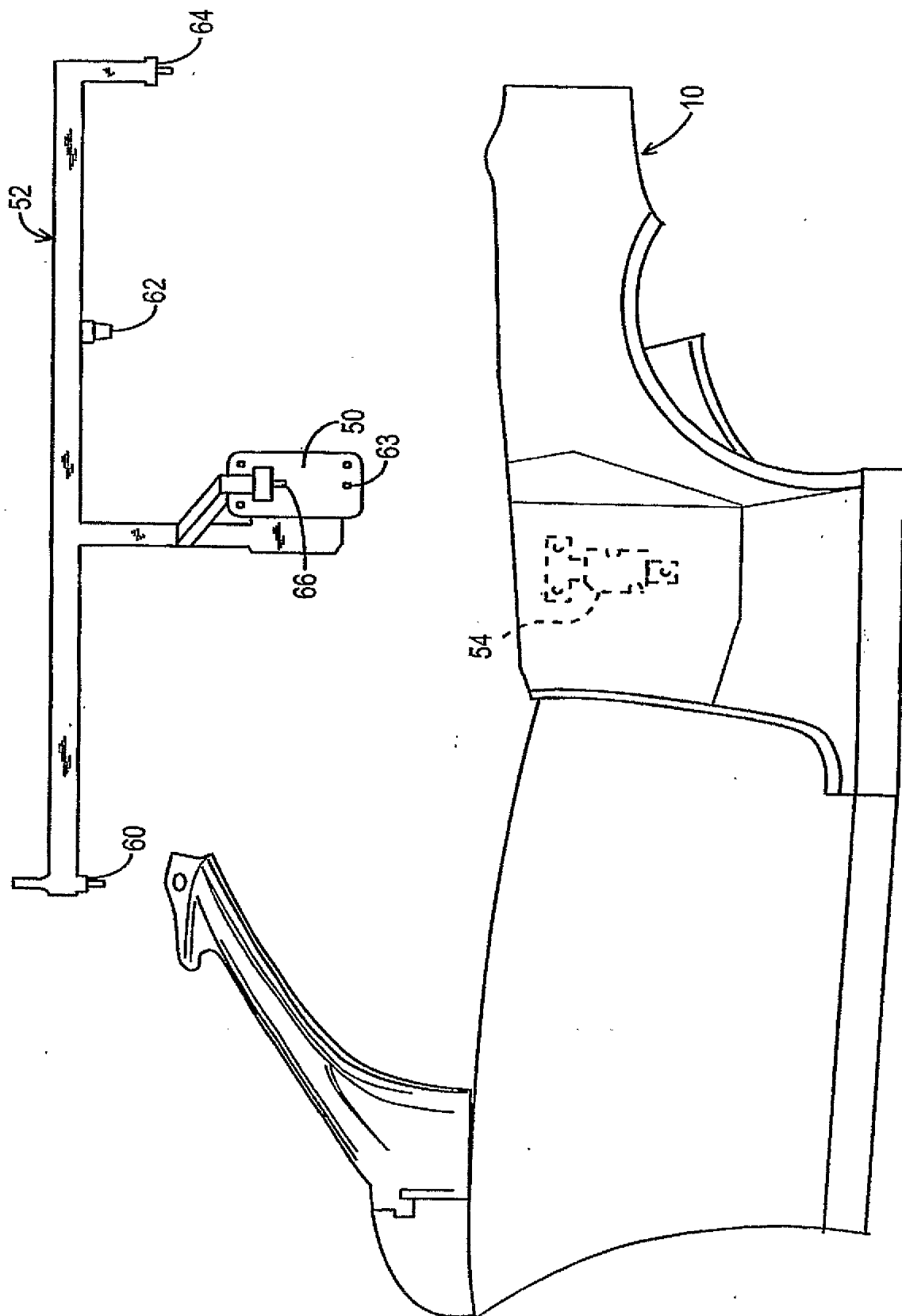


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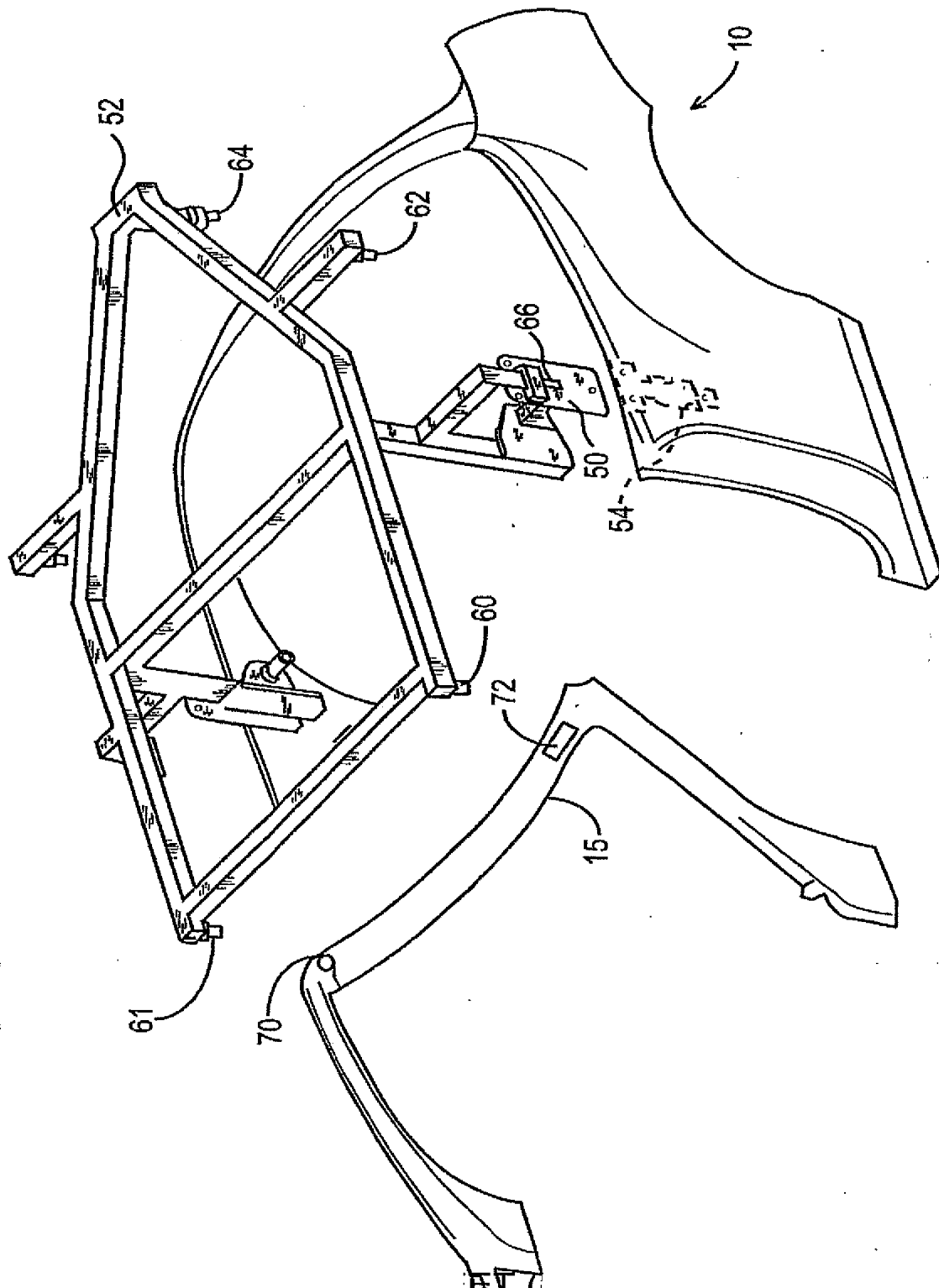
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FIG. 5A



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FIG. 6



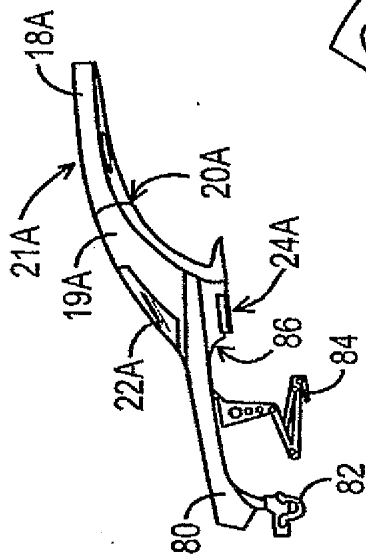


FIG. 7

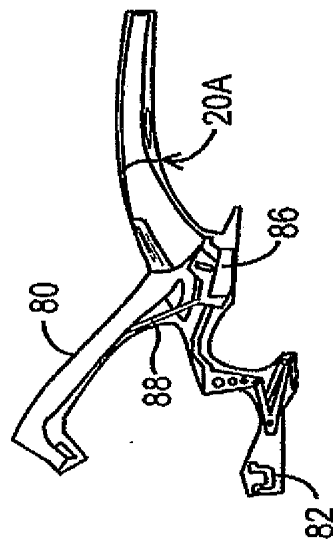


FIG. 8

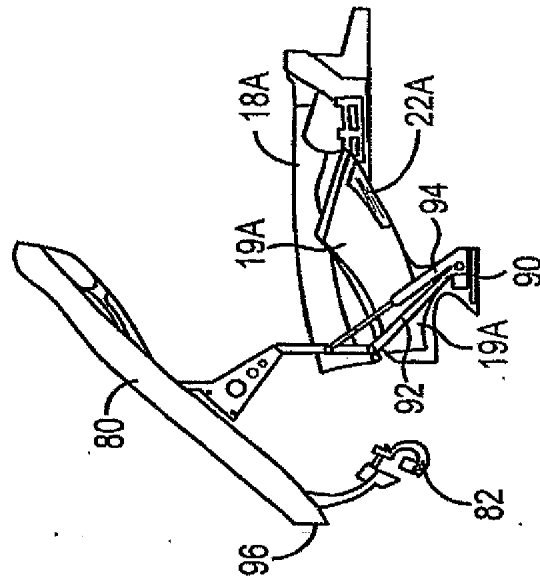


FIG. 9

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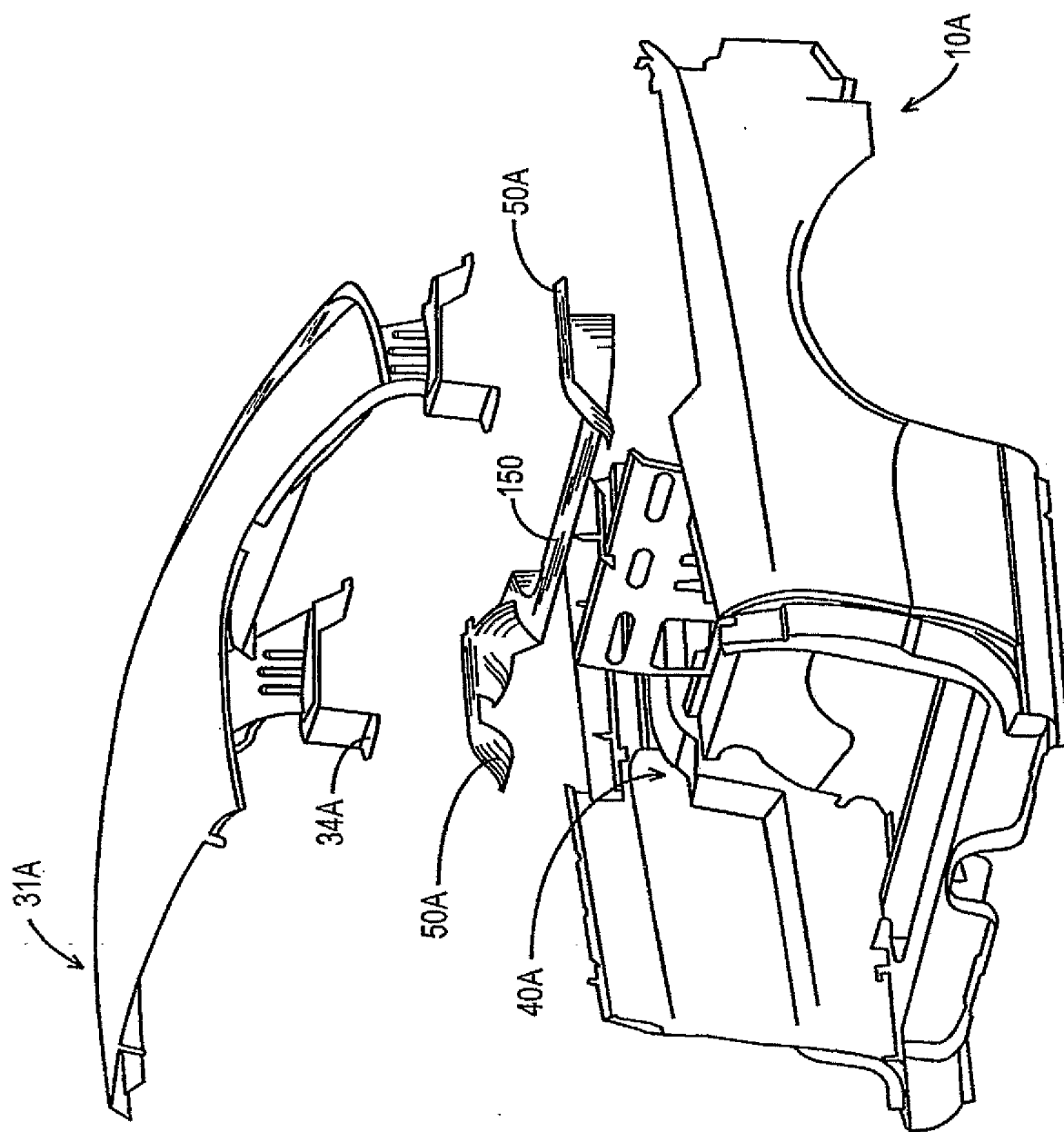


FIG. 10

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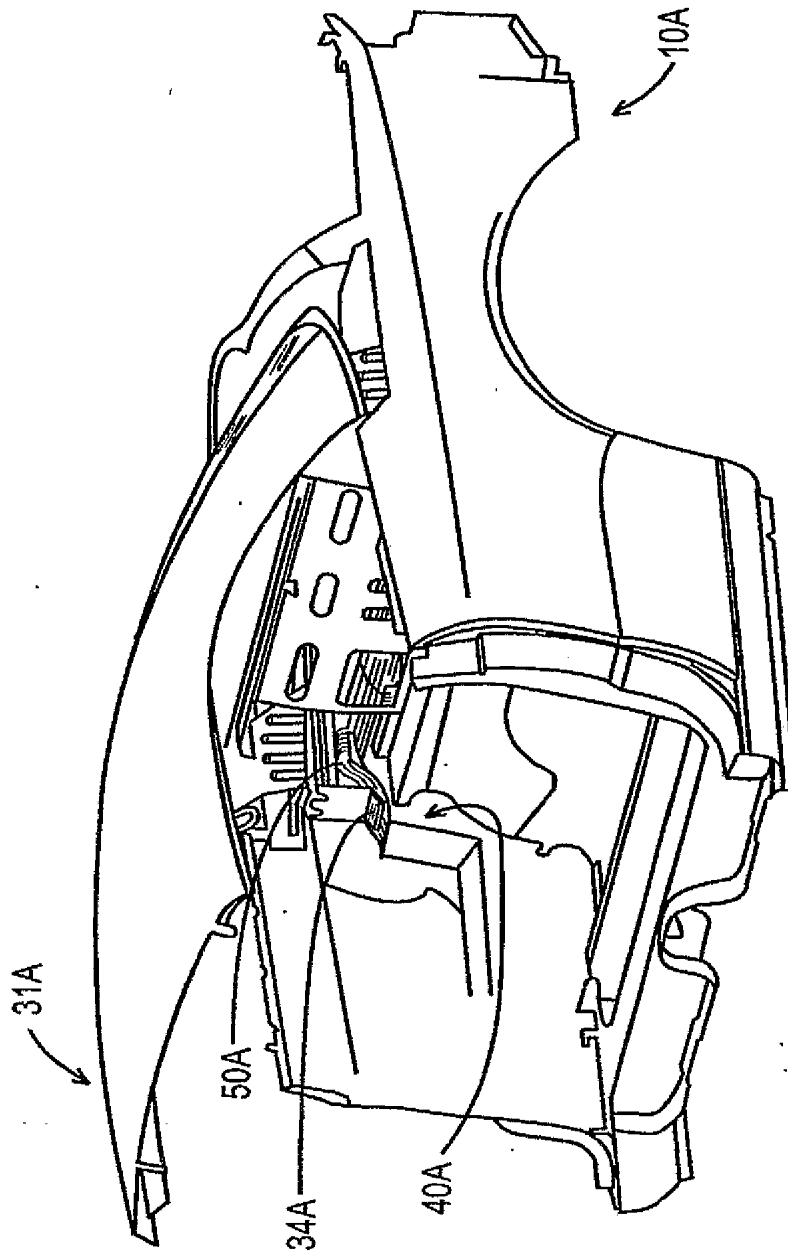


FIG. 11

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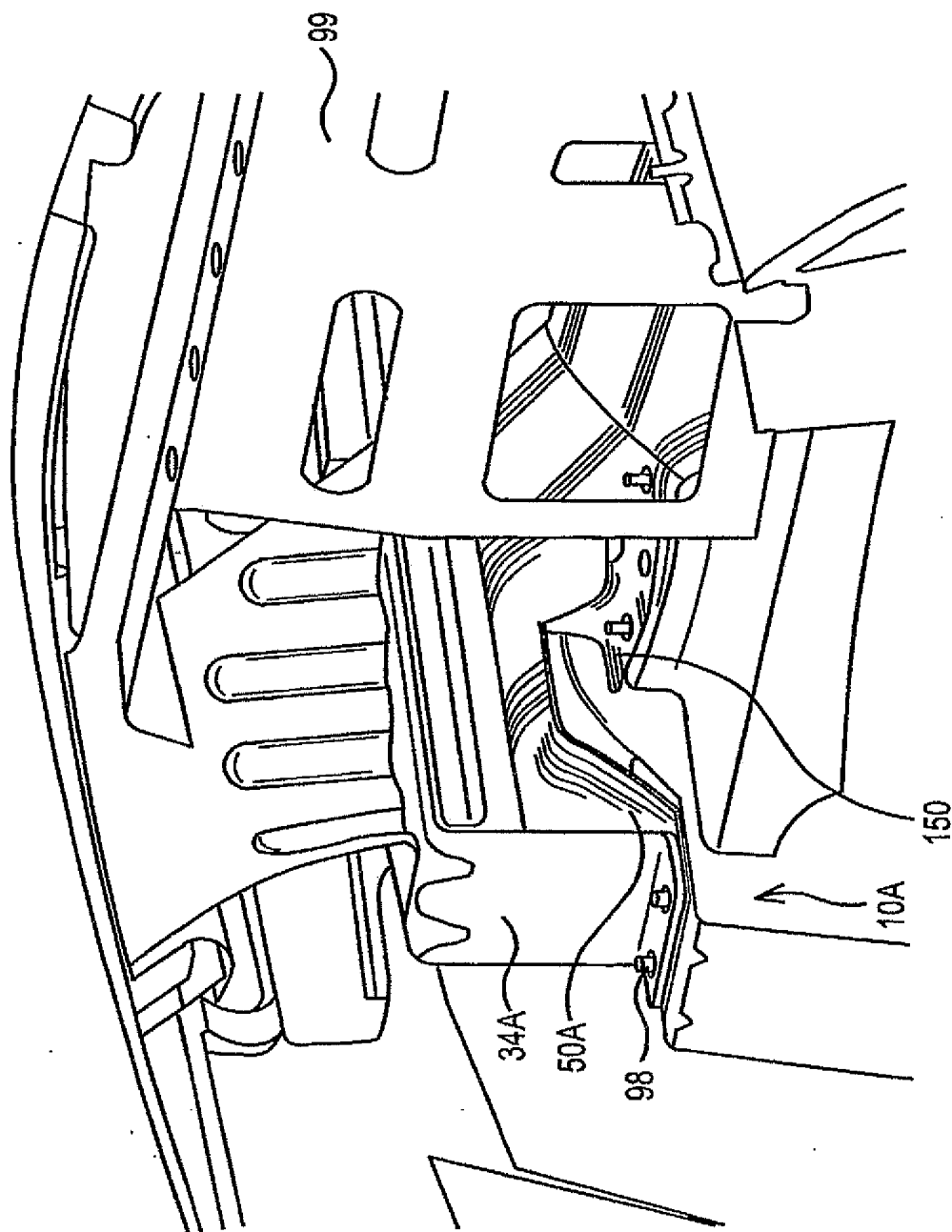


FIG. 12

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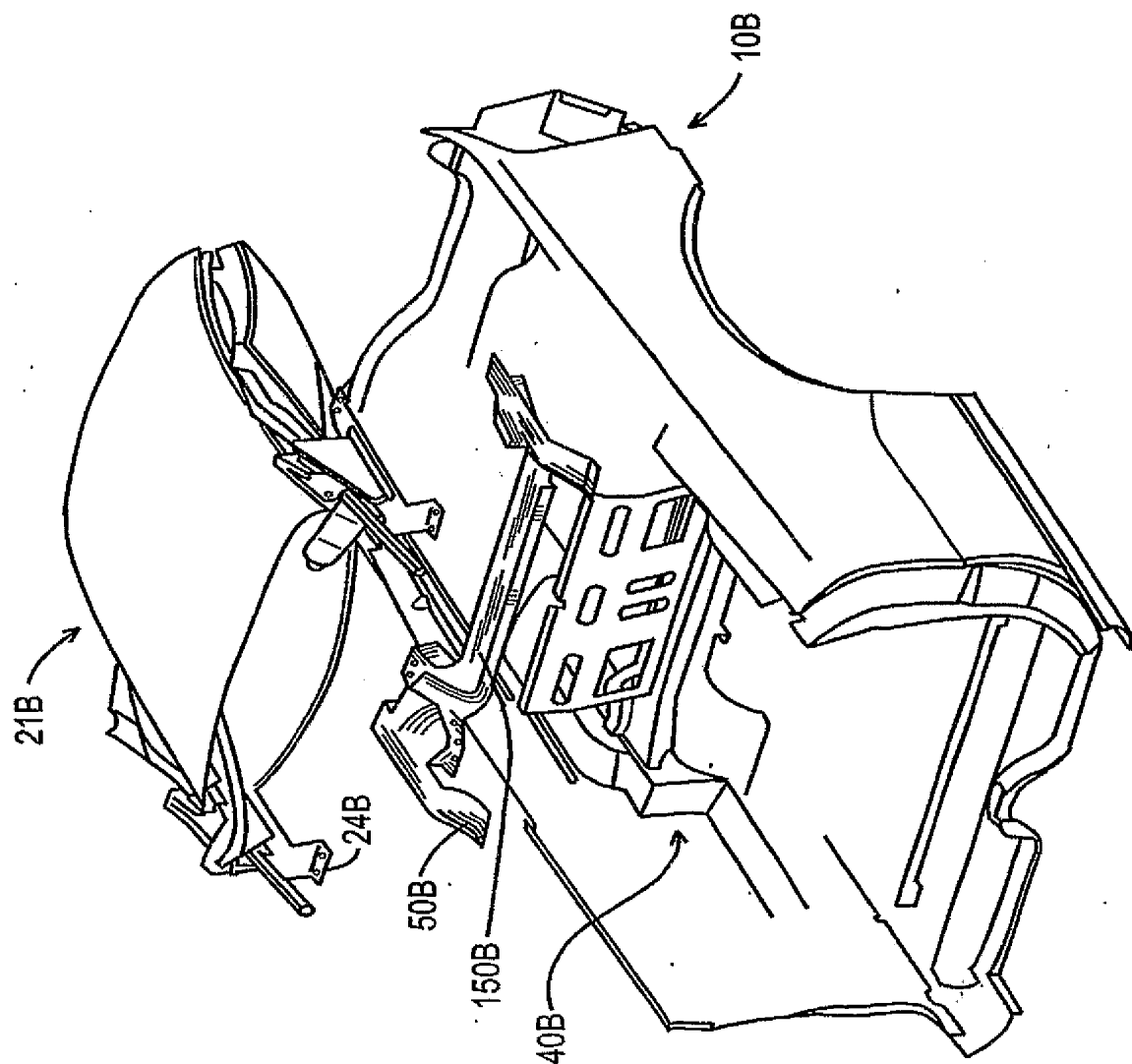


FIG. 13

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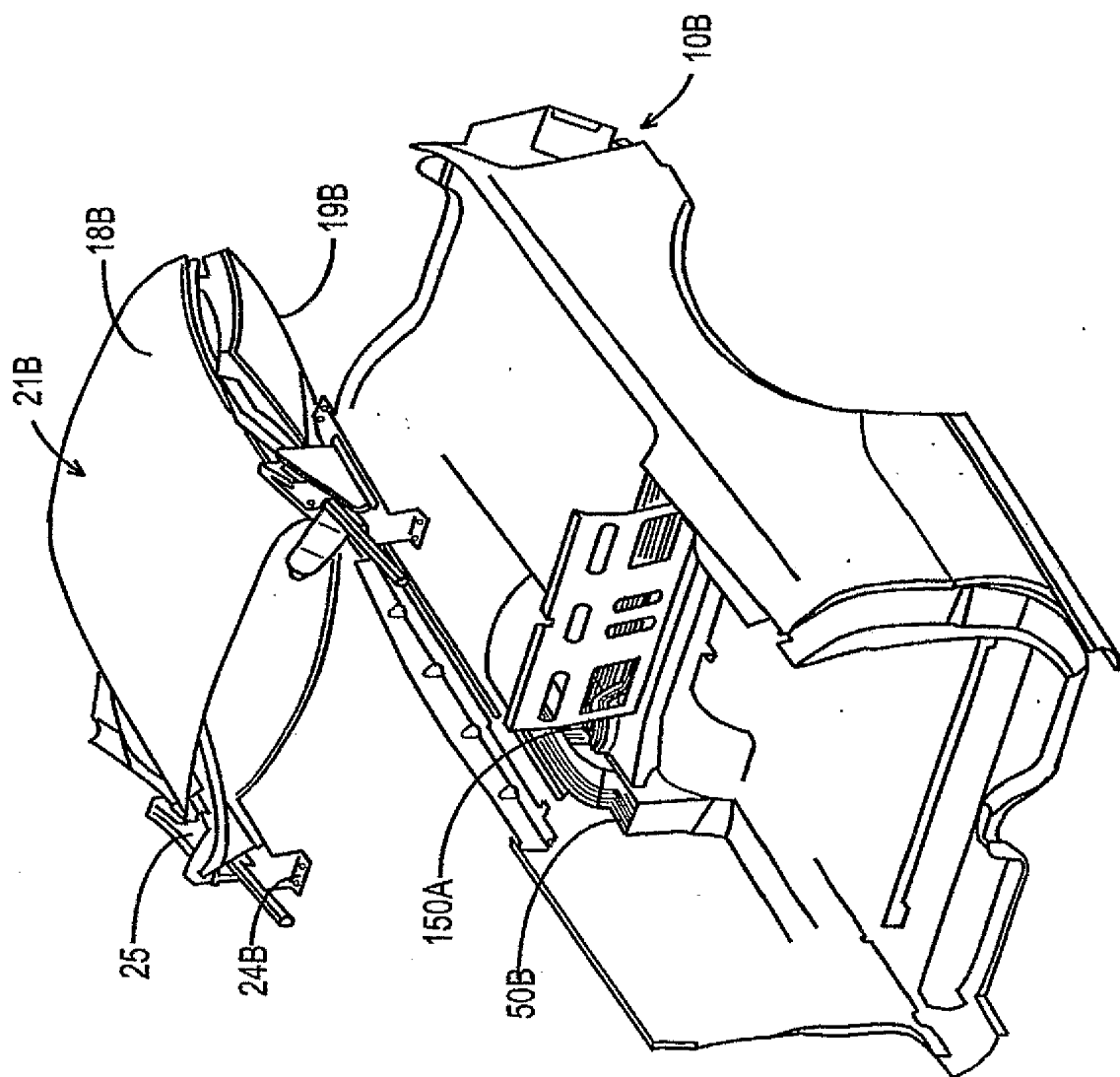


FIG. 14

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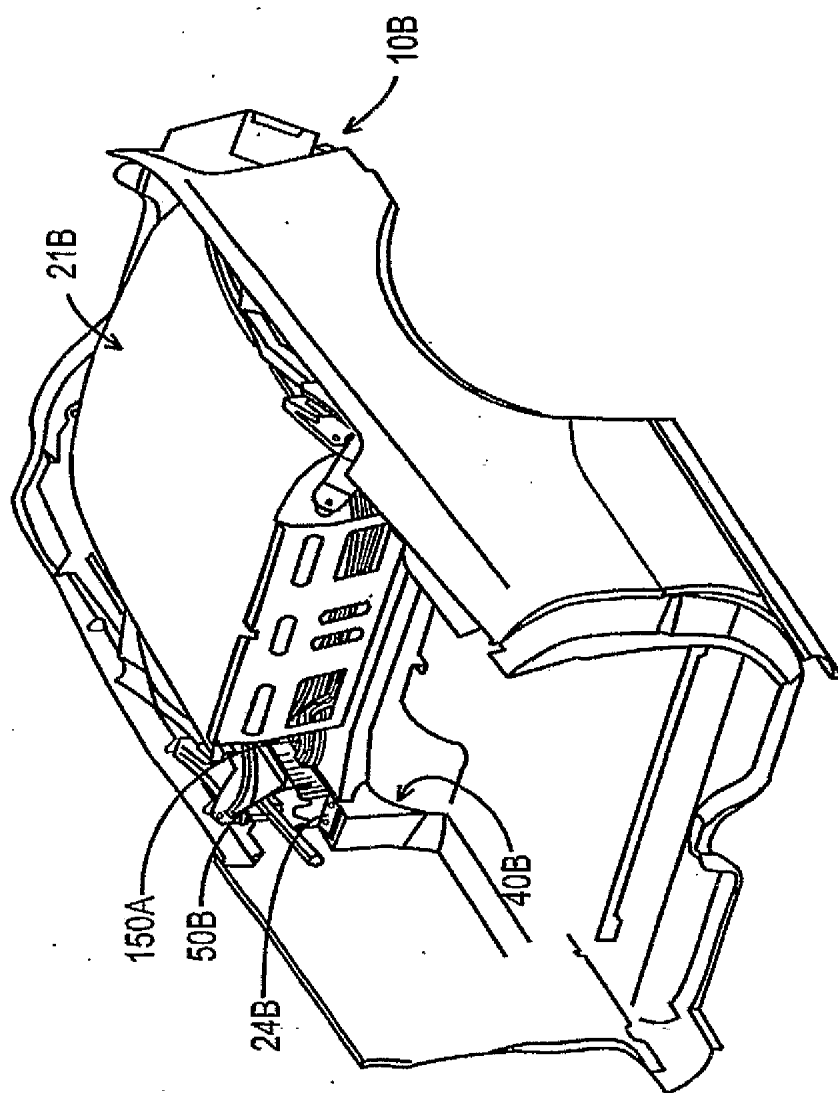


FIG. 15